

UNEC - D-772/76
Twenty-Sixth Session of the
UN Commission on the Status
of Women

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BACKGROUND PAPER

THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF POPULATION MATTERS TO
THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN
IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PROBLEM:

Though population is not listed per se as an item on the Provisional Agenda for the Twenty-Sixth Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, it is embedded in all the general items listed on the agenda. It is important that the United States Delegation to the Twenty-Sixth Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women be au courant with U.S. international population policy as it relates to the status of women and the involvement of women in socio-economic development and that appropriate language be inserted into documentation emanating from the Session.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF ISSUE TO THE UNITED STATES:

The United States government has been concerned at the highest level with international population policy. Ambassador Marshall Green, Coordinator of Population Affairs, is Chairman of an Interagency Task force on Population Policy. (See September 10 speech attached.)

The United States recognizes that population growth is inextricably linked to all phases of socio-economic development, including unemployment/underemployment, environmental degradation, food production, problems of rapid urbanization, and improvement in the status of women and their active participation as beneficiaries and as agents of change in community and national life.

The United States is committed in the United Nations General Assembly (Secretary Kissinger's speech before the 7th Special Session on the UNGA) and through bilateral and multilateral assistance programs to assist the peoples of less developed countries in the above interrelated areas of concern.

AID has a Congressional Mandate, the Percy Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which "calls for particular attention to those programs, projects, and activities which tend to integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus, improving their status and assisting the total development effort."

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UNITED STATES POSITION:

1. The United States should discreetly act as a catalyst in negotiations concerning population and interrelated issues as they affect the status and role of women.
2. The main thrust of U.S. Delegation argumentation should be that over 135 nations agreed to the principle of family planning at the World Population Conference and the World Conference of International Women's Year as related to socio-economic development and elevation of the status of women. In no way should this language be weaker than at these two Conferences. The World Plans of Action of both Conferences set forth the correlation of population factors with socio-economic development and improvement in the status of women; both Plans are mutually reinforcing.
3. It is especially important that the Draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Item 3(a)) be amended to include language as strong as that in the two Plans of Action referred to above. Accordingly, the U.S. Delegation should introduce or support amendments, as made by other delegations, to the Preamble and Article 10 (e).
4. In reviewing Agenda Item 3(b) on the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the U.S. Delegation should keep in mind that the indirect reference made to aspects of family planning was the first such reference made in an international instrument emanating from the Commission on the Status of Women. Such reluctance in language used is understandable in the time frame of 1967 but not in 1976 following the progress made over the past decade. It would be appropriate for the U.S. Delegation to mention this fact in discussion of the agenda item.
5. The U.S. Delegation should ensure that Population, as it relates to the status of women and socio-economic development, be included in all planning programs for the UN Decade on Women, in the Agenda for the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Commission, and for the 1980 Conference.
6. In discussing population issues, either in open fora or in private, U.S. Delegation members should avoid the semantics of "population control," which is not the same as a woman's right to control her own fertility (without which she cannot have equality). A few sensitive Latin American and African countries prefer such terms as "child spacing," "mother and child care," or "responsibility in parenthood."

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DISCUSSION:

1. Scope.

Family planning is central to improvement in the quality of life for women everywhere, which, in turn, makes possible their participation in socio-economic development within the framework of their families, communities, and nations. Unless women are given the information and means to control their own fertility, have alternatives to child-bearing, and lead healthier and more productive lives, the majority will be forever prey to the ravages of ignorance, poverty, and servitude -- their current condition in the poorer segments of the less developed nations.

Family planning is incorporated in maternal and child health programs, in community and national socio-economic developmental plans, and in those of most United Nations bodies and Specialized Agencies. It often spearheads a variety of community development projects organized by indigenous and/or international private and voluntary organizations.

Thus, matters concerning women's control of their own fertility -- of major significance to improvement of their status and consequent involvement in community and national life on their own behalf -- must be an integral part of the deliberations of such meetings as the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. It is the responsibility of the United States Delegation to pursue this task with delicate negotiation and diplomacy, especially with delegations from member governments such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Zaire, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Norway, Finland, and the United Kingdom. Otherwise, these issues will be shunted to the background as more glamorous and popular issues are given prominence.

2. The Interagency Task Force on Population Policy.

The Interagency Task Force view is that the United States lend even stronger support to worldwide efforts for the improved status of women and for their active participation in community and national life.

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The Interagency Task Force recognizes, as do innumerable studies,* that improving the status of women, thereby increasing their basic opportunities, is apparently of fundamental importance in lowering fertility.

The Task Force also gives particular attention to:

- (a) strong direction from national and provincial leaders;
- (b) emphasis on community participation to root family planning in village life; and,
- (c) integration of health, family planning, and nutrition, including training of competent multi-purpose paramedics to provide fellow villagers with family planning as well as other medical services (advocated by Secretary Kissinger at the 7th Special Session of the UNGA).

The Task Force provides interagency policy direction for U.S. bilateral and multilateral assistance and recognizes that all matters which affect the status of women are part and parcel of the above three-tiered approach. Such matters include:

- female education and training of various types and levels;
- female employment, especially in areas which will not compete unnecessarily with men;
- maternal and child health;
- nutritional status of women and children;
- women's participation in agricultural improvement;
- laws which affect women's status, such as age at marriage, family planning, etc.

These are the elements which form the totality of the concept we know as the "status of women." They affect women as (1) beneficiaries, and (2) actors in researching, planning, promoting, and conveying demographic and family planning policies and programs elementary to raising the status of women.

* Including the Report of the Special Rapporteur, Helvi Sipila, appointed by the UN Economic and Social Council under Resolution 1326 (XLIV) on Status of Women and Family Planning, submitted to the Twenty-Fifth Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

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3. Draft Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination
Against Women (Agenda Item 3(a)).

The Preamble to this very important document should reflect rights and responsibilities as contained in the World Population Plan of Action and in the World Plan of Action of International Women's Year.

The World Population Plan of Action states in paragraph 14(f):

"All couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so; the responsibility of couples and individuals in the exercise of this right takes into account the needs of their living and future children, and their responsibilities towards the community;"

The World Plan of Action of the World Conference of International Women's Year reads in paragraph 19:

"Individuals and couples have the right freely and responsibly to determine the number and spacing of their children and to have the information and the means to do so. The exercise of this right is basic to the attainment of any real equality between the sexes and without its achievement women are disadvantaged in their attempt to benefit from other reforms."

Article 10 (e) should guarantee access to information, education, and means to practice family planning. The responsibility of governments to execute programs should be stressed.

Attachments:

1. U. S. Responsibilities in World Population Issues
2. The Link Between Population and Other Global Issues
3. United Nations World Population Conference
4. The World Population Conference: An Assessment

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